

Stories Jesus Told (2): A Banquet RSVP

Luke 14:15-24

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Question – have you ever been stood up for a date?
How did it make you feel?
How did you respond?

Perhaps like this guy?.....

VIDEO – BEING STOOD UP

Did you know Jesus tells a “being-stood-up” story?
Only the stakes are higher, a lot higher, WAY more than just some first date between Tiffany and Eric.

Imagine, if you can, your marriage.
You send out the invitations, asking for RSVP's..... which people return.
And at deadline time you inform the caterer of the number.
They prepare accordingly.... and bill you accordingly.
The big day comes and, about an hour before, the text messages begin to roll in.
 ...We bought a new car last week. Looks like a nice day for a drive. Don't think we'll be coming.....
 ...Sorry, last day of sale at the Tanger Outlet Mall. Hope wedding goes well.....
 ...Wish you a good day. She-What-Must-Be-Obeyed said I should dip into the job jar today instead of coming. Cheers.....

Like – Really?
And they keep coming.
So you're left with an empty room, a pile of food, and a whopping big invoice.
How you going to be feeling?

That's the thread of what we'll be hearing today in our second of the series, “Stories Jesus Told.”

Please pull the yellow study guide out of your bulletin, as well as a bible.
We'll be going to Luke 14:15-24, p.1012

Before we read, though – let's pray.....

Come to close to us, Holy Spirit, as we read and think about this story that Jesus told. Take these Scripture Words and burn them into our hearts. Impress into our minds the meaning you wish us to take into our lives this coming week. Cause all distractions to fade away.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, a little background of what went on before Jesus tells his story. Jesus is invited to a banquet at the home of a leading religious official. They're setting him up in order to try and accuse him of something scandalous. They want to get rid of him. As much as they're eyeing him, Jesus is watching them. He notices the typical hoopla that went along with an event like this – all the social protocol of who sits where, and first, and all the rest.

That kind of protocol and social standing was considered very important in the day. It was seen as important because over the years Jewish religious teaching had evolved to say that God's favor rested only on Jews. And then, most of that favor rested upon healthy, educated and rich Jews. In fact, some scholars of the day were teaching that disabled Jews, even if they were super-devout, were not seen as important by God. Maybe even not welcome in heaven.

They fully believed that.

So where you sat now – at this banquet in the religious leader's house – might be a reflection of where you'll be sitting at the great heavenly banquet that will take place when God raises all believers from the dead.

Jesus clears his throat, and tries to tell the host that maybe it will be different on the Day of Resurrection. Maybe, Mr. Host, you ought to think about inviting the poor and the disabled to your banquet now... maybe *that's* actually a reflection of what you'll see at the Heavenly Banquet.

But the host, apparently, doesn't get it. Neither do his guests.

One of them picks up on the idea of the heavenly banquet.

I'm not sure if he's showing off. Or trying to look super religious. Or what. But this guy says to Jesus, "*Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.*" He's thinking, "*....that'll be us up near the head table.....*"

Jesus doesn't say "Yes" or "No."

Instead he tells a story.

Let's listen.....

Luke 14:15-24, p.1012

So.... they'd all been talking about the heavenly banquet – eating as guests of the Royal King of the Cosmos. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that Jesus is pointing in that direction with his tale of a banquet and a "certain man" preparing one.

Who's in.

Who's out.

And what happens.....

The story will tell.

Typical banquets in those days involved a servant coming with an invitation. You, the invited guest, would be expected to say "yes" or "no", and based on that the meal would be prepared. In that way, very much like sending in your RSVP to a wedding today. When you say "Yes" you know that the host is on the hook for the bill – that the plate will be waiting for you. You go – that's all there is to it.

Then, when the feast was ready, the master would send the servant out again to say, "All right, everything is ready. Time to come." And you would. Right away. Food is served. Now. To be late or a no-show was simply... well, you just didn't do that.

Shockingly, the excuses come rolling in.
Not even good ones.
Just cheap blow-offs.

The guy with the field – in those days you NEVER bought a field sight unseen. You'd have been there multiple times. Checking every inch of it. And only after that, you'd buy it.

It would be like saying, *"I just bought a house in Ottawa. But I've never seen it. So want to go and take a look at what I've sunk my money into."*

Like – really?

Or the one with the oxen – can you imagine saying, *"I can't come to your wedding. I just bought 5 used cars from a dealership in Renfrew. Not quite sure what they're like. So need to go and take them for a test drive."*

Really? You test drive **after** you've bought 'em?

Oxen were sold only AFTER having been tested multiple times by the purchaser. Perhaps on his own land. Perhaps on the seller's land.

To say what this fellow said to the host is an obvious insult.

And, to top it all off – the third guy. Now, we can't relate today. But in that culture you simply did NOT mention women in public. Not even your wife. Saying that he would be spending time with her was intensely rude.

The social and religious elite, who were expected at that great banquet all insulted and ignored the host.
And the host is livid.

What he will NOT do is let them sabotage his feast.
The celebration WILL go on.

And so the servant is sent out to bring in the very people that the elite figured would never make the cut...

"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."

Can you see what Jesus is doing?

But he's not done.

The host's generosity goes further.

"Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full."

Generosity is not just for locals.

People from away – foreigners, strangers, outsiders. **They'll** be welcomed.

"Make them come in....."

Social protocol of the day was that if you received an unexpected invitation, you would decline. At least at first. And the servant bearing the invitation would be expected to spend 15 minutes or so arguing that *you should come, you must come.... no, no, it just wouldn't be the same without you.... yes, yes, the host REALLY wants you there.... he'd be SO disappointed if you didn't come.*

Only after that would you say "yes."

Other translations have rendered verse 23 as "*Compel them to come in....*"

As for the rich and famous and religiously prominent ones who thought that maybe they could dictate their own terms to attending, if they even felt like coming.....
forget about it!

It's an abrupt message Jesus sends to the elite sitting with him.
Who spent so much time creating religious culture.
And thought they got to dictate all the terms.
Who had so little time or respect for him.

It's a bleak warning, actually.
Can you see that?

And

It's a message of hope to all whom these elite had shut out.
That maybe God in Heaven DID care for them.
And there was room at his royal banquet for them, too!!!

And then the unfathomable – there's room, also, for people from outside their village, outside their community, outside their circles.
The unclean. The unwanted.

Fast forward to today.
And work backwards with me.

There is room at the Heavenly Banquet table of Jesus for people from outside the village of faith. Those that, perhaps, we couldn't even begin to imagine God welcoming them. The Lord says, "Go..... Go, servants, and **compel** them to come in."

Do you get it?

These are people that can't imagine that God would care for them. Perhaps they have trouble even believing that God exists. They wonder. They doubt. They are skeptics. They stay away, thinking that church is no place for them.
Go – compel them.

The church that sits and passively waits for people to wander through their doors is not hearing what the Host of the Feast said.

The church in Kemptville that knows that some 10-15,000 new people will be moving here over the next decade or so, and just assumes that some will wander through the doors doesn't get what Jesus is saying.

Go.

Convince them that there is room for them.

Show them that they are wanted.

Be clear about how they are valued by the Host of the Feast himself.

Minister to the skeptics.

Traffic in a gospel that is clear to doubters.

Do your best to be winsome to those that feel they've been written off or shunned by the religious establishment.

Don't make them come to you.

You go to them.

Jesus isn't embarrassed to be seen with the unemployed, or welfare recipients, or the disabled, or the addicted, the divorced, the mentally ill, those with a criminal record, those unsure of their sexuality... or even the ones who found their names publicized on the Ashley Madison list.

Compel them to come in!

Show them they are welcome!

Church – don't wait for them to come. 'Cause they won't. They figure for sure that they won't be welcome. That they don't belong. Go to them. Tell them. They won't believe you at first. They'll protest. You'll have to dance the dance of building relationship with them, and slowly overcoming their hesitations and objections and fears. Prayerfully keep at it.

That's the last group.

Then there's the middle one – those from the streets and alleys of town.

In other words, the ones that are close to us, we know them, love them....

but they are not presently inside the banquet hall.

As summer comes to a close perhaps now is again a time to consider those who have dropped by the way; who used to be part of community of faith at KCRC but somehow have come to feel that they don't belong. They were once part of us.

You know them. The list is long. Pray for them. Seek an opportunity to warmly tell them that there is a place in Jesus' heart for them. Don't wait for them to figure it out. Invite them to come back to this community of Jesus, to their spiritual home and try it all over again.

Do you think I am spinning this way out of control?

Did you know that the picture of a Banquet feast with God comes right from the Old Testament?

Listen to Isaiah 25:6–9.

And as you listen, notice how often the word “**all**” is used.....

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for **all** peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines.

7 On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds **all** peoples,
the sheet that covers **all** nations;

8 he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears
from **all** faces;
he will remove his people’s disgrace
from **all** the earth.

The Lord has spoken.

9 In that day they will say,
“Surely this is our God;
we trusted in him, and he saved us.
This is the Lord, we trusted in him;
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

How different from the smug, narrow view of salvation held by those sitting with Jesus.

What do you think the message is to them?

What do you think the message is to us?

Here we are – having heard the invitation to a relationship with the Son of God, the Host of the Heavenly Banquet Feast of Salvation.

And many of us have said, “Yes, save a place for us.”

We’ve sent in our RSVP.

But what now?

When the word comes at the end, will we be ready? Will we be even wanting to go?
Or will we have become sidetracked by who-knows-what in life?

And, by the way, no matter how big, how wonderful it may sound – compared to the wonder of eternal glory, anything that distracts us now will look and sound terribly lame, totally cheap.

Do we want to be blowing the Lord off because of.... well.... whatever?

Standing him up because, well, “I don’t know what happened.... too many hours at work, soccer schedule demanded so much, school was busy, when I went the hymns were boring anyway, the weekend is short, I do believe.... sorta.”

What happened between that moment when we came back from camp so SURE in our faith, so ready to say YES to the Lord.... between that moment and now?

Maybe it’s just complacency. Expecting that we’re in. Of course, we’re in.
So we don’t think about it, or exercise that relationship or nurture it.
And we slowly drift away.

So perhaps today is also the time to think about the vitality of our faith relationship with the Host of the Banquet.

How much DO we treasure our RSVP to the feast in eternal glory?

To help with all this, on all three levels, when this series “Stories Jesus Told” comes to an end I'm preparing a series that'll deal with some of the doubts and challenges that often cripple or bust up peoples' faith.

That may be helpful in your own faith walk,
as well as your relationships and conversations with friends and family that used to believe and have wandered away
or with those who have never believed at all.

Who knows? Some of them might even want to take this series in when it comes....
you might want to pray for the Lord to provide an opening for you to invite them?

One last thing – did you notice the parable remains unfinished? The command to the servants to go and compel the outsiders to come in is left dangling.

Because the parable is still being written.

By you and me.

What ending are we at KCRC writing?